

GUIDELINES FOR INVOCATIONS

The Newport Beach City Council has a long tradition of beginning each City Council meeting with a pledge of allegiance and an invocation. Recently, the Court of Appeal ruled that certain invocations - those that constitute sectarian prayer - violate the Establishment Clause of the Federal Constitution (Rubin v. City of Burbank (101 Cal. App. 4th 1194 (2002))). The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that invocations comply with the law so that we retain the right to open public meetings with words of inspiration and wisdom.

The City Council believes that the purpose of an invocation is to recognize the role that freedom of religion has played in the history of this country and the contribution that religious groups make to the quality of life in this community - and not to promote or discourage any particular religious belief. The City Council is confident that anyone who agrees to give an invocation consistent with this Policy will offer words that respect the laws and institutions that protect the freedom we all enjoy.

The City Council has determined that invocations that comply with the following guidelines are consistent with the Rubin decision.

- A. The tone, tenor and content of the invocation would not, to a reasonable person, be considered as advancing or disparaging a specific religion.
- B. The invocation does not refer to terms associated with a specific religion, sect or deity such as "Jesus Christ", "Allah" or "Our Father in Heaven."
- C. The invocation does not refer to a particular religious holiday, significant date, holy day or religious event.
- D. The person giving the invocation does not read or quote from any sectarian book, doctrine or material.

The City Attorney shall send a letter to each person who has agreed to give an invocation expressing the City Council's appreciation for volunteering and confirming his/her intention to offer an invocation that is fully consistent with this policy.

Adopted - January 27, 2004